

HUMANAE VITAE: The Natural Way of Love

The Reasons of a Choice

The Italian Confederation of the Centers for the Natural Regulation of Fertility felt called, in this particular historical moment, to take a stance—in its own field—in the debate that arose at the Synod on the Family, and especially with respect to the doctrine presented in *Humanae Vitae*. While many expect a word of confirmation, many others seem to be awaiting from the Church presumed, so-called, “openness” in this regard, i.e. a radical change in the doctrine on contraception.

The Confederation wants to point out immediately that *Humanae Vitae* is not trivially the encyclical on contraception or on the prohibition of the use of contraception, as is commonly said. Anyone with the courage to finally read the encyclical personally, should acknowledge in it a great hymn to conjugal love, that is, a text that expresses—without inventing or arbitrarily deciding—the fullness and beauty, in a word, the truth of conjugal love. The clear proposal of the natural methods as the only way permitting, protecting and promoting the love of the couple as total mutual giving and acceptance is an inherent to the possibility of experiencing this truth: to verify, or to *make true* each day, in the flesh of the spouses, what happened in the wedding.

It is good to point out that natural methods are not merely a gift for believers, and also that although perhaps only the Church has invested heavily in this direction, promoting and urging scientific research on natural methods, it remains true that the latter are neither a product nor an invention of the Church. **Natural methods, in fact, are originally and primarily based on the structure of the human being, on the difference between male and female, and on the dynamics of the natural course inscribed in the only possible truth of conjugal sexuality, that between man and woman, in every act.** In this sense *Humanae Vitae* merely recognizes what has always belonged to the human being, to every human being and to the couple, and this means that the proposal of the natural methods is for everyone and available to everyone, to say it with other words and in a modern language: it is secular and non-confessional. In this sense, the refusal of contraception is not simply an inhuman and incomprehensible prohibition, but rather the logical consequence of the great “yes” said to the fullness and beauty of love. The natural method implies, moreover, nothing other than learning the alphabet in which the physiology of human sexuality is written.

Anyone who thinks that the natural method is yet another moralistic imperative from above imposed by the Catholic Church, a principle that grinds and crushes the person, proves that he does not understand at all what the natural methods are: these methods are not used as if they were something extrinsic with respect to the person, but **they are experienced in the dimension of the couple, they are inhabited**; and the person who makes this experience *feel at home*, because he/she simply more become him/herself more radically in and with his/her own body. And not only that! Precisely thanks to the scientific rigor of the highest level that can be reached today, they allow, on the one hand, postponing and distancing pregnancies, while on the other promoting conscious pursuit of pregnancy, thus showing once again—along with their very high technical and scientific effectiveness—that they can contribute to the expansion of the couple’s generosity and especially that of a love which is open to the acceptance of the child as the fruit of love.

Conversely, when a man and a woman use contraception, refusing the gift of life, they also refuse one another, because they do not give and do not accept the totality of what they are: one refuses to give to the other his/her own fertility while refusing to accept the other's fertility. **The first meaning of contraception—it is good to clarify this—is not anticonceptual, but anti-conjugal**, because it deprives us, robs us of the experience of total mutual giving and acceptance to the point of distorting us, since it impedes us from being really and radically ourselves and does not allow us to accept the other in his/her radical reality, as he or she is and feels. In contraception, sexuality appears precisely as the negation of oneself: having sex with another person while rejecting the other ... is self-contradictory: if sexuality is by its nature the drive towards another, in contraception, sexuality is lived in a self-referential way in which “two make love” ... with the desire to live “pleasure” (?) alone.

It is therefore not true that “love is love” and that “the important thing is to love one another,” beyond the concrete expressions. Nor is it true that every couple is free to decide with what tool to manage (regulation/negation) fertility in the way that best suits it, because love needs to express itself in giving, through self-giving and mutual reception that is not only sincere—as an intentional subjective dimension—but also true—as an objective dimension, which attests in the flesh the concrete truth of the gift and the reception: one cannot still one's hunger simply with the desire to eat, just as it takes more than food to make a meal pleasant.

Whoever thinks that natural methods are not for everyone; those who believe that they cannot be used by all; those who believe that they cannot be suggested to everyone ... by thinking this way are in fact giving people less than they deserve; they are depriving the couple of a great gift: that of themselves, of what they already have available and can live as a gift. Now, this concerns not only couples but also their children. In fact, what father or what mother wants for their children less than the maximum that they can give them? Does a parent not want the *best* for their children? What educator believes that children are not able to live the fullness of love inscribed in the DNA of each person? This kind of educator, instead of *drawing out* the best, would merely be playing with the lives of young people, without giving them the fullness of one of the most decisive experiences in each existence, that of love and sexuality. Now, this does not mean closing our eyes to real situations; in fact, it is rather precisely intended to address and resolve them. All of us see, every day, from different angles, the social situation that has led to alleged sexual liberalization, but in fact has made many prisoners of disordered, unhappy and suffering sexuality.

Sex *education* that offers contraception, to “protect,” to shelter you from unwanted pregnancies and prevent abortions ... is misleading: moreover, it produces exactly the contrary of what it conjectures, because it offers poisoned means and tools that deprive the younger generation of the possibility of experiencing love as the fullness of life, thus leading our adolescents to self-depreciation through the experience (dis)educational sexual practices that, while “politically correct”, are in reality hypocritically false and contemptible.

Centering then the education of the person exclusively on the possible consequences of his actions also implies losing sight of the person, and so we stop taking care of the person before us: “Do whatever you want, have fun; what's important is to avoid ...” Every educator, animator ... knows well that what he says does not always coincide with what is perceived and that what is lived is worth more than what is taught: this is why our young people often have the impression that sexuality is not fundamentally a precious reality. Are our young people living a tragic reality on the level of affective sexuality? Yes but we are giving them the tools that get them every more deeply stuck in the tragedy of lives increasingly perceived as insignificant! How can we imagine that they

can fight for life from conception on, if we do not tell them first the value of their own lives? If they do not grasp their own uniqueness and how precious they are ... how can they understand and contemplate this in others? or in a “lump of cells”? If we do not allow them to experience the fullness of love, how can we expect them to learn to love life from conception onward?

Chastity, on the other hand, is simply the result of the perception of self-worth: I conserve and guard myself, and I do not discard or sell myself because I am precious ... and I acknowledge this about myself, and this is how I feel. Those who learn self-control also learn how to live their instincts in the form of a gift, precisely because they never become enslaved by them. And like the natural methods, chastity also is a gift to be offered civilly, secularly, because it is a deep experience of humanization. Is there a human being who does not expect or deserve to be humanized? Those proposing the use of contraception not only stand against the fullness of life of the couple, but also against the humanization of the human person.

This is why the Church has always wanted—and did so thematically in an explicit manner in 1968—to deal with the couple’s and, therefore, man’s sexuality: not by means of a form of expression of power and social control, nor because of some prurient obsession with sex, but because in such intimate—but not private—dimensions man’s happiness and that of couples plays a big role, since it is possible to experience, in this dimension, the greatness of conjugal love, the source of all human love. The Church is our Mother, not only because she can offer mercy to the repentant sinner, but also because, as every mother, she **wants** the best for her children and, hence, must also be their teacher: fundamentally, her being a teacher is simply the expression of her fertility as mother.

The Italian Confederation of Centers for the Natural Regulation of Fertility feels especially touched at this moment in time by the upcoming beatification of Pope Paul VI, and wishes to express their gratitude for *Humanae Vitae* by faithfully continuing to propose, through the natural methods, the beauty and truth of conjugal love.